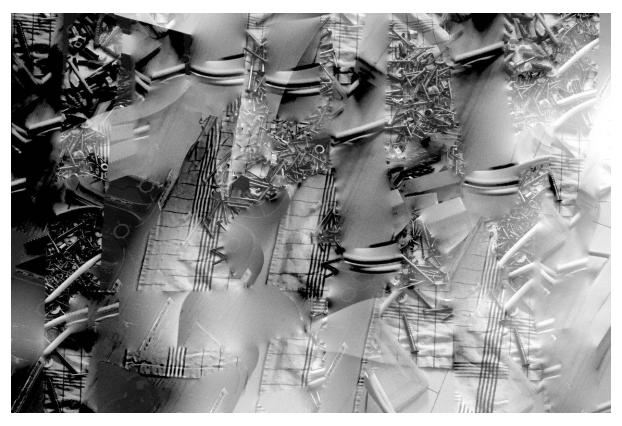CRAIG HICKMAN   2022-04-15

OUR PAST, OUR FUTURE: POSTHUMAN, INHUMAN, AND TRANSHUMAN PHILOSOPHIES AND TECHNOLOGIES

ALL, MASHINES   ACCELERATIONISM, INHUMAN, TECHNOLOGY, TRANSHUMANISM

As Patrick Lee Miller in his book Becoming God: Pure Reason in Early Greek Philosophy the central goal of the pre-Socratics through Plato was the ancient notion of becoming "divine and immortal". Over the past couple decades, I've toyed with posthuman, inhuman, and transhuman philosophies.

Posthuman philosophy typified by the work of David Roden and Francesca Fernando. Fernando sees it "as a theoretical philosophy of the difference, which demystifies any ontological polarization through the postmodern practice of deconstruction. Therefore, we have defined it, at the modal level, as a post-centrism and a post-exclusivism: a "post" which is constantly opening possibilities and does not comply with stationary hierarchical views. This epistemic opening does not rely on assimilations to the same, but on acknowledgments of diversity, in tune with evolutionary processes, which manifest in dynamics of diversification. In this sense, evolution can be addressed as a technology of existence: "physis" ("nature" in Greek) and "techne" are co-constitutive domains." (Posthuman Philosophy, 186). Roden sees "posthumans in very general terms as hypothetical wide "descendants" of current humans that are no longer human in consequence of some history of technological alteration. Speculative posthumanism is the claim that such beings might be produced as part of a feasible future history." (Posthuman Life: Philosophy at the Edge of the Human, 105)

Inhuman philosophy which in its contemporary manifestation as seen in the Promethean philosophies of Ray Brassier and Reza Negarestani among others seeks to instantiate a New Reason, one that exalts abstraction and intelligence as the goal of a philosophy as the "organ of self-cultivation of intelligence," an "as-if" historical program for "investigating the consequences of the possibility of thinking and having mind." (Negarestani: Intelligence and Spirit, 14) Brassier tells us that "Prometheanism requires the reassertion of subjectivism, but a subjectivism without selfhood, which articulates an autonomy without voluntarism. The critique of Prometheanism in the philosophical literature of the twentieth century is tied to a critique of metaphysical voluntarism" (Robin Mackay. #Accelerate: The Accelerationist Reader). This eliminative philosophy which seeks to distance itself from philosophies of Will from its Medieval forms from Agustine to Schopenhauer to Heidegger becomes for Brassier the underpinning of the Enhancement or Neo-Liberal Transhumanist vision proper:

"its advocates are champions of neoliberal capitalism, which they claim has emerged as the victor in   the war of competing narratives about the possibilities of human history. So, why does nbic technology have this radical transformational capacity? Because according to its advocates it renders possible the technological re-engineering of human nature." (ibid.)

Against this Neo-Liberal ideology of technological transcendence Brassier offers a Left turn take on Prometheanism,

"We can choose to resign ourselves to these characteristics and accept the way the world is. Alternatively, and more interestingly, we can try   to reexamine the philosophical foundations of a Promethean project that is implicit in Marx— the project of re-engineering ourselves and   our world on a more rational basis. Among Badiou's signal virtues   is to have dared to challenge the facile postmodern doxa which   has been used for so long to castigate Prometheanism. Even if one disagrees with the philosophical details of Badiou's account of the relation between event and subjectivity, as I do, there is something to   be gained by trying to reconnect his account of the necessity of this   subjectivation to an analysis of the biological, economic, and historical processes that condition rational subjectivation. This is obviously a   huge task. But it is in the

first instance a research programme whose   philosophical legitimacy needs to be defended, because it has for too   long been dismissed as a dangerous fantasy. The presuppositions fueling this dismissal are ultimately theological. Moreover, even if Prometheanism does harbour undeniable phantasmatic residues, these can be diagnosed, analysed, and perhaps transformed on the   basis of further analysis. Everything is more or less phantasmatic. One cannot reproach a rational project for its phantasmatic residues unless one is secretly dreaming of a rationality that would be wholly devoid of imaginary influences. Prometheanism promises an overcoming of   the opposition between reason and imagination: reason is fuelled   by imagination, but it can also remake the limits of the imagination." (Ibid.)

The Transhuman paradigm is part of the contemporary logics of late capitalism, and one might suggest a return to what Gyorgi E. Szonyi terms "the ideology of exaltatio", that is, the deification of man, which I see as the intellectual foundation of magic, a foundation that even today validates magical thinking" in the transhumanist dreams of becoming immortal gods. (John Dee, xiv) As David Herbert in Becoming God: Transhumanism and the Quest for Cybernetic Immortality suggests: "transhumanism is a growing syncretistic movement of transhumanists among the intelligentsia, borrowing elements from all of the above, has taken the next logical step in the development of a humanistic, neo-pagan anthropology and social vision based on the ancient idea of technogenesis and evolutionism. These scientists, business leaders, technologists, futurists, politicians and artists place a messianic hope in the ideal of a post-human world, holding that the key to humanity's future lies in realizing godhood (omniscience, immortality, etc.) by the merging of man with his technology. That is, what was once thought possible by ascending a scale of being inherent in the universe through heroism, or mystical incantation, man now will accomplish by the control of evolutionism through his own technological work and his merging with what he has created."

This whole ethical dilemma about the use of genetics to modify or enhance the human species has always seemed spurious to me. We use these various biotechnologies on animals and plants and insects etc., but we still categorize ourselves as something else, something different, something other than all of these (aha!) lesser creatures. No. We're not special, and the same biotechnologies that have and are modifying the genetic heritage and future of other species will become a part of the tool bag of human selective pressures as ideology, politics, and biomedical notions change in the near future; that, and obviously the economic underpinnings in both Capitalist and the quasi-tyrannical Communist enclaves. In fact, in tyrannies like China under Xi such bioethical considerations are passe and they are moving ahead in directions that the West apparently chooses to limit and control, so that China and other connected nations in their hegemony will indeed move into this brave new world without our permission.

Why should we put limits on our healthcare? Brassier uses Dupuy who quotes Ivan Illich whose humanist leanings put limits saying,

we will never eliminate pain:
we will not cure all disorders:
we will certainly die.

But so what? If we can eliminate most pains, most disorders, and offer if not immortality at least a longer life then why should we put some limit on experimentation and the sciences who seek such things through genetics or other biochemical and artificial measures? For Illich then, it is 'unreasonable' to want to extend life or improve health beyond certain pre-determined limits. Significantly, these limits are at once empirical, which is to say biological, and transcendental, which is to say existential. The rationality that is heedless of this empirico-transcendental limit in seeking to diminish suffering and death is a 'sickening disorder'. (ibid.) Illich's outmoded humanism would let us suffer our miserable existence because it goes against God and the Natural. Sad. That to me is the real sickening disorder: a mode of thought that would trap us in a world of suffering, and that supports its mode of existence with metaphysical humanism as a form of imposition and limit.

Hell, I have many things that old age has thrown at me from diabetes, sleep apnea, heart ventriculation, gout, and other things that come with age and probably genetic disorders. I suffer from these even if I do it for the most part stoically and in silence. And, sure, here I am at 69 almost 70 wondering why one spends almost 40+ years gaining the knowledge and wisdom to actually do and say something worthwhile only to realize that one will probably not live long enough to do it. So why wouldn't one want a longer life?

I'll admit that even though I'm a sort of para-scholar of the whole pessimistic tradition I'm in actuality not a full-blown pessimist. I'm forward looking, not an optimist but more of a pragmatic realist who realizes most of our philosophical outlooks are just as human and anthropocentric as all thought is. So another reason I look at posthuman, inhuman, and transhuman thought, because the past philosophies did not break free of the old essentialist arguments.

We live in a moment when something new is arising in our midst and yet we still rely on outmoded philosophies to navigate this 'newness'…. we stumble forward like misguided fools.

The Djinn is out of the bag…. so all our progressive bioethical hand wringing is not going to dissuade or stop what is in truth a technology that will effectively produce something beyond or outside our powers to stop it unless this, too, will lead to some political or actual war…

Each of these paths in philosophical and technological speculation have different trajectories, and in many ways, we need to understand what these divergent systems of thought and ideology portend for the future of humanity. Because it is truly about three different inventions of the future that seem to arise out of our confrontations with the past, with our own histories and technologies.

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